



MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week
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Legislative Priorities Advance to Halfway Mark

JEFFERSON CITY — With the Senate's mid-session recess now here, I am pleased to report that three pieces of legislation I sponsored have received full Senate approval and are at the Missouri House for equal consideration. I feel confident of their merits and trust that they will receive positive support from the House and be forwarded to the governor's desk for signing into law.

Two of my top legislative priorities — curbing copper theft and adding more information to Missouri's DNA profiling system — were passed by the Senate just this week before heading to the House. In addition, House members are considering my bill that establishes the Pharmacy Rebates Fund, a fund that ensures any revenues received by the state from pharmaceutical manufacturer rebates, as required by state or federal law, are deposited into the MO HealthNet pharmacy program.

My copper theft bill (SB 1034) will require stronger record-keeping by scrap dealers and make it a felony to steal or sell stolen copper or aluminum. Expansion of the DNA profiling system (SB 754) requires juveniles found guilty of certain sexual crimes, murder and heinous crimes to provide a sample to the state's DNA depository. The DNA profiling system is a valuable tool in assisting federal, state and local law enforcement agencies with identifying, investigating and prosecuting individuals.

The third piece of legislation (SB 1068) under deliberation by the House will direct the state's share of pharmaceutical rebate dollars to the state-supported pharmacy program. If approved, an estimated \$78.2 million in the state's share of pharmaceutical rebate dollars, and a state- and federal-combined rebate of \$208 million, could be deposited into the fund in 2008.

Since this session began, I have also worked diligently to forward other measures, including several education-related proposals. Last week, the Senate Education Committee — of which I am chair — considered my measure to establish statewide procedures for teaching groups and school districts

involved in collective bargaining negotiations. This measure is referred to as the Professional Relationships Between Teachers and School Districts Act (SB 1158) and provides a proper framework for teachers, school personnel and their respective governing bodies to discuss salary, benefits and other matters. Everyone benefits from better working and learning conditions in our Missouri schools.

The Senate gave first-round approval last week to my proposal that will bring Missouri public schools into compliance with the federal regulations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (SBs 1225 & 1226). The measure requires a five business day notice for presenting evidence at special education due process hearings between school districts and parents. (The measure removes a previous allowance for expedited hearings). Under the agreement, the school board may assign a school administrator or attorney to act on their behalf who would be given authority to enter into agreements during due process hearings.

Expanding the loan offerings available through the Higher Education Loan Authority of the State of Missouri (MOHELA) is another of my proposals (SB 967). The bill awaits a possible vote for first-round Senate approval and will allow MOHELA to originate, or serve as the original funding source for, federally-guaranteed Stafford loans. Origination of Stafford loans under the Federal Family Education Loan Program must not exceed 10% of the previous year's total Missouri Federal Family Education Loan Program volume. This measure would help level the playing field with student loan organizations from other states.

Finally, one of my other top legislative priorities is under Senate consideration and I hope will be taken up for perfection (first-round approval) sometime during this session. Earlier this year, I offered a bill that would provide more protections for the unborn (SB 1058) by expanding Missouri's abortion law to include providing a broader range of educational materials to pregnant women considering an abortion and make it a crime to coerce an abortion. Securing protection for those who cannot speak for themselves is very important to me and I will continue to do all that I can to protect the unborn by forwarding laws that will give expectant mothers every chance to say "yes" to life.

We've made a lot of progress this session, and I look forward to continuing the important work of enacting just and impactful laws that improve the lives of Missouri citizens.

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*Senator Rob Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid,
Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.*